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THE COMMODORE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

ERASTUS OSGOOD

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FITZGERALD PUBLISHING CORP'N, 18 Vesey St., N. Y.

THE COMMODORE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

ERASTUS OSGOOD

AUTHOR OF "THE HARVEST," "A DELIGHTFUL CON-
SPIRACY," "RETURN OF THE GOBLINS," ETC.

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NOTE.—The Moving Picture and Professional Acting Rights of this play are expressly reserved by the publishers, to whom theatrical managers who wish to produce it should apply. Free for amateurs.

THE COMMODORE

CHARACTERS

TONY BAXTER
EDITH, *his wife*
DICK BRAYLEY
ISABEL, *his wife*
MRS. DARLING
WATKINS
"THE COMMODORE"
LIEUTENANT MINTON
SOPHIE KENT
JOHN WRASPER

TIME:—The present. LOCALITY:—A Summer Home on Long Island Sound.

TIME OF PLAYING:—A full evening.

ACT I. A study in tangles.

ACT II. A study in intrigue.

ACT III. A study in wireless.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

TONY	}	Clean-cut, good-looking young people. DICK and ISABEL a little older than TONY and EDITH. Both women are well bred, no suggestion of "loud" type of actress. All wear becoming summer dress.
EDITH		
DICK		
ISABEL		

MRS. DARLING. A fine-looking woman of about thirty-five to forty. Vivacious, competent, lovable.

WATKINS. A conventional type of English butler. His chief characteristic is to become easily "rattled."

"THE COMMODORE." A fairly solidly built man of forty-five to fifty. Iron-gray hair. Ruddy complexion. Never loses his dignity even in the lighter scenes. Possesses a keen sense of humor.

MINTON. Tall, good-looking naval officer.

SOPHIE KENT. Good looking in a bold way. About

twenty-five. Sharp dark eyes. Gives the impression of being clever in her line, "a crook."

JOHN WRASPER. A man about fifty. Sallow complexion. Weighs his words in speaking. In short, "a slick article." Furtive glance.

INCIDENTAL PROPERTIES

Dishes and silver for breakfast set. Flowers in vase. Writing paper and pencils on table. Copy of "Vanity Fair" bound in red or some other conspicuous binding. Pad and pencil for ISABEL. Two good-sized vases on mantel. Pipe on mantel. Eight stamped letters. Two newspapers off L.C. for WATKINS. Field-glasses in room R. for DICK. Small hand bell on table. Whistle for yacht off L. Report of cannon off R. Two photos in frames on mantel. One of ISABEL in gilt frame and one of NANCY in a different style frame.

ACT II

Practical lamp on table. A smaller table in place of the one used for breakfast. Long, gilt beaded purse or pocketbook for SOPHIE, containing banknotes, and small package of pebbles (uncut stones). Auto horn off L. Also "choochoo" for departing car. Letters and documents for WRASPER. Note from WRASPER for WATKINS to bring in to DICK. Note for WATKINS to slip in "Vanity Fair." Flashlight for MRS. DARLING. Small hand bell. Magazine and books on table C.

ACT III

"Vanity Fair" for TONY. Beaded purse off R. for WATKINS to bring in. Writing paper and pencils in drawer of library table. Wallet containing old paper for "COMMODORE." Reading glass in table drawer. Matches on mantel.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As seen by a performer on the stage facing the audience, R. means right hand; L., left hand; C., center; D.R., door at right; D.L., door at left. UP means toward back of stage; DOWN, toward footlights.

THE COMMODORE

ACT I

SCENE:—*Breakfast-room in the country home of Mrs. DARLING. Doors R. and L. Curtained entrance L. between D.L. and rear flat. Practical French window center of rear flat opening on porch. Water backing. Mantel DOWN R.; bookcase and small table and telephone UP R. and L. Large table L.C. Sideboard L. between D.L. and curtained entrance. Settee DOWN R. Chairs, etc., as may be desired. Breakfast just over. DISCOVERED Mrs. DARLING at back of table arranging flowers in vase. ISABEL at her R., writing on pad. DICK on settee DOWN R., rolling cigarette. TONY at bookcase UP R.C., selecting books. EDITH standing near him by French window.*

EDITH. Are you looking for some special book, Tony?

TONY. N—o. I have decided to take up solid reading, and believe—let me see, I will start in on good old “Vanity Fair.” (*Holds up book in red or some other conspicuous binding*)

DICK. Tony, you’re a joke! (*Laughing*) I bet you don’t read six chapters.

TONY. What, *Me*?

ISABEL. There. That makes every hour in the day accounted for. Just listen to this schedule.

DICK. Making a time-table? When does the fifteen leave?

ISABEL. Oh, subside. As you all know, I am a firm believer in system. System is a great economizer of time.

TONY (*in barker’s tone of voice*). Tickets for the lecture on system only twenty-five cents.

ISABEL. Please, Tony, do be quiet when I am trying to be serious. As I was saying, system is a great economizer of time. Now we young honeymooners want to make every hour in the day count, so I have drawn up

this schedule. Rise at 6.30. (*Sighs and groans from the others*) A dip in the Sound at 6.45. Breakfast at 7.15. If this arrangement meets with Mrs. Darling's approval?

MRS. DARLING. Certainly, Isabel. A fine idea.

ISABEL. Then an hour for reading the morning's mail and papers.

DICK. An hour! Gee, this is no correspondence school. To see whether the Giants won about lets me out on the papers.

TONY (*yawning*). Me too.

ISABEL. From 8.30 to 9 we devote to——

EDITH. The mail has just arrived. Watkins is bringing it up.

DICK (*consulting watch*). And it's nine o'clock. That rather upsets your schedule, dear, what?

ISABEL. Oh, well, for the time being.

ENTER WATKINS *through French window. He comes DOWN and hands letters and papers to* MRS. DARLING.

MRS. D. Thank you, Watkins. You may remove the things.

TONY. Now for the great event of the day. (*Young people gather about table*)

MRS. D. Two for you, Edith. Three for Isabel. One for Dick——

TONY. And I get—left. I'm glad of it. Me for the sporting page. (*Picks up paper. Goes over to mantel. Gets pipe and saunters out on veranda*)

MRS. D. (*smiling*). Owing to lateness of mail, this morning's schedule is subject to change. (*Business of opening her mail. WATKINS slowly removes breakfast things*)

EDITH (*opens letter, glances at it, crushes it, throws it down*). The poor love-sick fool. (*Opens another letter*)

MRS. D. An invitation from the Hardings to join them on a picnic. Very kind in Mrs. Harding.

ISABEL. Hurrah, folkses! Freeman writes me I am to have the part. (*Rises, goes over to c.*) Just listen! (*Reads from letter*) "My dear Miss Hampton. After a stiff argument with Peters, he insists that you must

create the role of Nattilie in his new comedy, or there will be nothing doing, so I am rather forced to accept his terms, but I will only sign you up on a conditional contract. If the play proves a success——” (*Speaking*) Prove a success! It can’t help it. It’s the best thing Peters ever did. Isn’t it glorious?

EDITH. I’m awfully glad, dear. I wish I was as fortunate. The agent writes there is no part for me in the new play at the Delta.

ISABEL. Isn’t that a shame! But you will probably catch onto something better later in the season. Well, I have certainly got my chance at last, haven’t I, Dickie boy? (*Goes over where DICK is deeply absorbed in his letter and caresses him*)

DICK (*looking up*). Ah! A—— What’s that?

ISABEL (*mocking him*). Ah, what’s that? And to think I’ve only been married to that man ten days, and when his wife is given a chance to appear on Broadway he looks up and gasps, What’s that? (*More serious tone*) What is it, Dick—something very important? No bad news?

DICK (*with puzzled air*). No. Oh, my—no. (*Nervous laugh*) I don’t know whether it’s a joke, or—I am soon to become a millionaire.

MRS. D. That sounds interesting.

ISABEL. For pity’s sake, Dick, explain.

DICK. It’s a letter from a lawyer, a Mr. John Wrasper, and reads like the scenario of a comedy, a farce, or a tragedy according from what angle one chooses to accept it. It’s too long to read in full, but briefly, its plot is this: A Mr. Murray Talbot, who claims he was an old friend and partner of my late father’s, is coming East to look me up, and incidently hand me over—maybe—quite a bunch of money. It seems some mines the partners considered worthless have suddenly sprung into life, and for the past two years have been coughing up gold nuggets.

EDITH. Then where does the joke come in?

ISABEL. Yes, or the tragedy?

DICK. Just here. I don’t recall ever hearing my father speak of a Mr. Murray Talbot, nor of owning any shares

in a gold mine. They were certainly not listed among his few securities.

MRS. D. That's strange.

ISABEL. Well, what steps are you going to take in the matter?

DICK. None, at present. Mr. Talbot, I understand it, is going to do all the stepping. Mr. Wrasper informs me that Talbot has been given my address, so I suppose is likely to drop in on us almost any day.

ISABEL. And our sub-rosa honeymoon dissipated right there and then. Of course we could not hope to keep our marriage a secret for long.

DICK. Not necessarily. If you insist, you girls can be introduced at first by your stage names, Lilla Hampton and Nancy Merrill.

ISABEL. Yes, I know, but somehow I feel that——

MRS. D. Trust me to handle that end of the situation if Mr. Talbot does call. (*Smiling*) An artful widow can be very resourceful when occasion demands.

EDITH (*going over and putting her arms around MRS. DARLING*). You lovely dear, and you have been so splendid to us in every way, managed our secret weddings, and invited us here to your lovely home to spend our honeymoon.

MRS. D. There, there, Edith, you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. It has all been a delight to me. I still love a romance. (*They continue to converse in pantomime*)

DICK. I do hope this may all be true. Of course, dear, this being on the stage is all very well, but it's awfully hard work for any woman. All this talk about winning fame and fortune, we know is more or less a gamble. I want to take care of you all by myself, lady dear.

ISABEL. I know it, Dickie boy, and you have worked like a Turk to make your dream come true. But we've got each other now for keeps, haven't we?—and if this unexpected money comes to you, it can't buy a single tiny bit more of my love, for I have given it all away, you see. (*Kisses him*)

TONY (*comes rushing in excitedly from veranda, with*

newspaper in hand). By the Great Horn Spoon, girls, here's the deuce to pay! I am afraid you are both likely to be drawn into a wretched muddle.

DICK. Great Scott! What new thunderbolt has struck?

TONY. It's simply infamous. Just listen to this, the head-lines especially. (*Reads*) "Actresses' names figure in hold up. An elderly man who, to avoid publicity, admits giving to the press the fictitious name of Dexter, has reported to the police the loss of valuable personal property which he alleges was stolen from him while on the train en route to New York. He states he was drawn into conversation with two attractive young women who claimed they were two well-known stage favorites, Lilla Hampton and Nancy Merrill. On leaving the impostors at the Grand Central Station, the trusting elderly gentleman discovered that he had been relieved of a considerable amount of money and a case containing several uncut precious stones. Plain-clothes men calling at the apartments of the actresses were informed that the fair tenants were out of town. Miss Hampton and Miss Merrill are highly respected in the profession, and will doubtlessly be much annoyed on learning of their names being used by the daring crooks." (*Speaking*) Now what do you know about that?

EDITH. Oh, the wretches!

ISABEL. It's horrible!

MRS. D. I am inclined to think that there was a spirit of revenge behind those women using your names. I fancy I detect a personal note.

TONY. Yes, revenge or jealousy.

MRS. D. There are two motives suggested, girls. It's up to you to get on the scent, as the detectives say.

EDITH. I didn't know we had an enemy in the world.

ISABEL. Nor I. I—I wonder if Inez, that impudent maid we discharged, could have dared——

EDITH. Oh, she couldn't be so daring, so vicious, as to vent her spite in this way.

TONY. Oh, piffle! A low-down woman will attempt anything when out for revenge.

EDITH. Perhaps, but——

DICK. It looks to me more like a case of jealousy!

ISABEL. I am especially annoyed at such a thing happening just as I am to appear in a prominent role, some people may be unkind enough to say it's the work of a press agent, to bring me into the limelight, and I hate such cheap notoriety. (TONY *has been busy cutting clipping from paper, observed by* EDITH and WATKINS)

EDITH. You surely don't want to save that disgraceful notice, Tony?

TONY (*grins*). Why not? As an addition to the chamber of horrors. (*Places the clipping in large vase standing R. on mantel*)

ISABEL. I want to forget it. (*During the foregoing, WATKINS has been removing remains of breakfast, putting some things on sideboard, carrying out dishes on tray etc., hearing snatches of conversation. He now coughs discreetly*)

MRS. D. You wish to speak to me, Watkins?

WATKINS. Yes, if you please, Mrs. Darling. Hodge asked me to report that a steam yacht came to anchor a half hour since, a short distance from your private landing, and certain parties on board have been watching this house through glasses. Hodge thought you better be informed. To him it looked suspicious.

MRS. D. (*starting up*). Watching this house through glasses! (*They all rush to window at back*)

DICK. Yes, there she is.

ISABEL. And isn't she a beauty!

TONY. See, they are bringing the dory alongside, and two sailors and a man dressed in white are getting in.

EDITH. I really believe it is heading in the direction of your landing Mrs. Darling.

MRS. D. It certainly is. I don't know the yacht. Never saw it before to my knowledge.

DICK. And there's another craft off there in the distance; looks like a revenue cutter.

EDITH. My! But this is becoming exciting! Yes, the dory is going to land here, I wonder——

ISABEL. Oh, Dick, supposing it should be Mr. Murray Talbot come to look you up?

DICK. What, in a revenue cutter?

ISABEL. No, stupid, in the yacht.

DICK. It is possible of course. (*Laughs*) I seem to have a hunch that it may be.

MRS. D. Then you all better scatter, and let me first interview Mr. Talbot.

DICK. Just a moment till I get my glasses, I want to examine these craft at closer range. [EXIT D.R.

MRS. D. Now shoo all of you, and don't dare to appear till I signal with this bell. (*Edith, Tony and ISABEL retire UP to D.R. and converse in pantomime*)

WATKINS. Beg pardon, but have you any special orders for me or Hodge?

MRS. D. (*rather excited*). Yes, you and Hodge go meet this man at the landing. If he seems to be in the least suspicious, give him evasive answers. Tell him this is the home of—Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Robinson. Any name you like. If he seems a gentleman—why, show him up. (*WATKINS about to leave room*) One moment, Watkins. Possibly his name may be Talbot. Note carefully what name he gives. But above all, Watkins, be evasive.

WATKINS (*confused*). Yes, Mrs. Darling, be evasive. Just so. You are—Mrs. Brown, a-a Mrs. Smith or—Mrs. Robinson. Just so. He may be Watkins, a-a—I mean Talbot. I beg pardon, be evasive. Just so.

[*Comedy* EXIT *by window*. MRS. D. EXIT D.L.

ENTER DICK D.R. *with glasses, looks off, screened by window.*

DICK. Yes, it's a revenue cutter. And she's steering full head on for this inlet.

TONY. Has the dory landed yet?

DICK. Can't see from here, and don't want to expose myself. (*Report of cannon heard in distance*) The cutter has fired a shot to signal or warn someone.

EDITH. Oh, Tony, I'm becoming frightened. There's too much happening—all of a sudden.

ISABEL. I'm not *frightened*, but maybe it's the time for disappearing. (*Glides into room R., followed by EDITH*)

DICK (*grinning*). To seek the seclusion which the cabin grants, like the chap in "Pinafore."

TONY. I think perhaps Mrs. Darling would be just as well pleased if we all kept under cover till she gives the signal, but I'm going to take one more peep in spite of orders. (*Goes over and looks out of window, dodges back*) Good night! Watkins and the man in white are almost at the door! Beat it, Dick, while the beating's good
[*They EXIT quickly* R.]

After a slight pause, ENTER WATKINS followed by THE COMMODORE.

WATKINS. Well—sir, I should have to ask Mrs. Brown—that is—I should say—Mrs. Robinson.

COMMODORE. I haven't the slightest doubt you mean well, my good fellow, but as a cheerful liar you're a failure.

WATKINS. I—I beg pardon, sir——

COMMODORE. You should, I forgive you. Now, Watkins, unless the mistress of this house is triplets or a Mormon, she cannot possibly be Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Robinson, as you would try and make me believe.

WATKINS. I assure you, sir——

COMMODORE. Don't try, you couldn't. Watkins, you may mean well, but you've been miscast. To begin with, unless I am very much mistaken, your name is not Watkins.

WATKINS (*evidently startled*). Why, sir—I——

COMMODORE. At least it wasn't when you were a waiter at The Cecil five years ago. I happened to be in the hotel at the time when you were discharged, and I am afraid somewhat under a cloud.

WATKINS (*earnestly*). I swear, sir, I was innocent.

COMMODORE (*duel of eyes*). I believe you. That's the first thing you have told me today that rings absolutely true.

WATKINS. I—beg that—that unfortunate affair does not come to the ears of Mrs.——

COMMODORE (*holding up protesting hand*). Don't tell me her name, I want to find it out for myself. The fair

lady, doubtless for some good reason, evidently wishes to keep her identity a secret from me at present. That's her privilege. And as to keeping your secret, nothing doing. We are all brothers under the skin, Watkins, and the best of us are liable to slip a cog as the chain of life pays out over the windlass. Are you free to tell me—mind, don't feel you must—has the madam many guests at present?

WATKINS. Certainly, sir| I am sure Mrs.—the madam would not object to my telling you that. There are two couples, Mr. and Mrs. Brayley, and Mr. and Mrs. Baxter. They are on their honeymoon, sir.

COMMODORE. Brayley, Brayley; the name sounds very familiar. Honeymooners? They could not have selected a more ideal spot.

WATKINS. Shall I tell Mrs.—the madam that a gentleman wishes to see her?

COMMODORE. If you will, Watkins. (ENTER MRS. DARLING D.L.) No, you needn't.

MRS. D. (*bowing stiffly*). You wish to see me, sir?

COMMODORE. Yes, if you will allow a humble stranger that pleasure.

MRS. D. Please be seated. (*She sits*)

[EXIT WATKINS D.L.]

COMMODORE. Thank you. (*He sits*) I have called, madam—Mrs.— Ah, well, you must see it makes it a little awkward for me, not knowing whether I have the honor of addressing Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Robinson. Your butler mentioned all three names.

MRS. D. (*smiling in spite of herself*). I fear Watkins rather bungled my instructions. My name is neither Brown, Smith nor Robinson, but under the circumstances names scarcely signify, at least until you have kindly stated your object in seeking this interview.

COMMODORE. Certainly, madam, since it is your wish. As you say, names do not signify, so you may address me in your brief replies as Commodore, at present of the good yacht "Vixen"; as further credentials, retired mining expert, recently returned from the West. But the object of my call: It may seem trivial to you, but I am most desirous of telephoning to the city an important

message. Quite an amount of money is involved, and possibly the aid of the police. After carefully scrutinizing the houses along the shore through my field-glasses, your charming residence appeared to be the only one I could discover visibly equipped with wires, so I have called to beg the privilege of using your 'phone.

MRS. D. Your request is modest, Commodore. Certainly my 'phone is at your disposal. Might I venture to inquire if you are trying to locate someone summering along the shore?

COMMODORE. That is precisely the object of my quest.

MRS. D. Then possibly I can be of assistance to you. Mind, I say possibly, and perhaps save you time and trouble. (*Smiling*) Would you be unduly surprised if I addressed you as Mr. Talbot?

COMMODORE. Not in the least, Madam. During my checkered career I have been addressed by strangers as Brown, Smith and even Robinson, and probably Talbot, but for the moment I don't seem to recall——

MRS. D. I do not wish to appear insistent, Commodore, but if your name happened to be Murray Talbot, a charming acquaintance of mine would be very glad to meet you.

COMMODORE. Really, Madam, you interest me deeply, but I feel confident the person I am seeking would object very much to meeting me. I am almost sorry, for the possibilities you suggest are so attractive that you almost persuade me——

MRS. D. But I am detaining you from sending your message.

COMMODORE. Thank you for reminding me. I was becoming so absorbed—— (*Three sharp whistles heard from yacht. COMMODORE rises*) A signal from my yacht for me to return at once. I regret exceedingly that I am obliged to terminate this delightful interview so abruptly, but the call is most imperative. Have I your permission to return and send my message, Mrs.——?

MRS. D. (*impulsively*). Darling. (*Annoyed at her slip*)

COMMODORE (*registers surprise. Half mocking smile*). Mrs. Darling? (*Turns and goes towards French window*)

MRS. D. (*angry at herself*). Sir! You have misunderstood me. My name is——

COMMODORE. Darling. Good morning, Mrs. Darling.
[*Gracious bow and EXIT by window.*]

MRS. D. I'm a fool! (*Strikes bell violently*)

ISABEL, TONY, EDITH and DICK ENTER *hurriedly* D.R.

ISABEL. Well?

DICK. Was it Murray Talbot?

EDITH. You look excited.

TONY. Who was it?

MRS. D. I don't know.

ISABEL. Has he gone?

MRS. D. Yes, he's gone, but he's coming back. I don't know what his name is. I tried to be very clever and dignified, and made a mess of the whole thing.

EDITH. But he must have given some name!

MRS. D. Well, he didn't. He avoided doing so artistically, diplomatically and now I think of it—perhaps villainously. He preferred to be known simply as the Commodore. He—was rather nice, and evidently a gentleman.

EDITH. Did you give him your name?

MRS. D. No.—Yes. In a fool moment I blurted out Darling, but I think he took it as a joke,—or—I was trying to invite a flirtation. Don't any of you ever call me clever again. I'm—what is it Tony calls the ball-players?—I'm a bonehead.

EDITH. But why should he doubt you?

MRS. D. Because as you know I told Watkins to be evasive, and tell the man my name was Brown or Smith or Robinson; and the idiot must have become rattled and given all three names. The man probably takes me for a crook or a lunatic.

DICK. Didn't, didn't you find out *anything*?

MRS. D. Yes, he's a retired mining expert just returned from the West. Wanted to telephone an important message to the city. Big amount of money involved, and perhaps the police.

DICK. It might be Talbot, at that.

MRS. D. Yes, or an English ambassador, or a confidence man, or Sherlock Holmes.

EDITH. Horrors! A detective. (*Drops into chair*)

TONY. What on earth is the matter now?

ISABEL (*in a wail*). Can't you see—a detective, sent down here by that elderly man Dexter to arrest us for robbing him! Oh, Dick, Dick, and we were so happy!

TONY (*walking excitedly about*). Well, here's a pretty how-to-do.

DICK (*consoling ISABEL*). There there, dear, don't cry. We are all as innocent as lambs, so don't get frightened at shadows.

MRS. D. But when he returns, what role am I to assume; be on the offensive or defensive?

DICK. Why—of course, if you discover—or he admits he is Talbot, receive him—figuratively speaking—with open arms.

MRS. D. (*still annoyed at herself*). Discover? Umph. I couldn't discover Mount Washington if I stood at its base.

DICK. See here, folkses, it's beginning to dawn on me that we may be getting this panicky business just reversed. We all know that we have clear consciences, while the actions of this Commodore are open to suspicion. Calling here to 'phone a message sounds fishy to me.

MRS. D. I thought so at first, but the possibility that he might be Talbot warned me I must be civil to the man.

TONY. But what started him off on this "all-of-a-sudden Peggy" business?

MRS. D. A signal from his yacht. Didn't you hear the three sharp whistles? He claimed the call was imperative.

TONY. I wonder if the sudden appearance of this revenue cutter figures in this business?

ISABEL. Great head, Tony. Can't you all see how it might be possible that his dropping in here to 'phone might be a ruse to mislead someone. I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

EDITH. He may be a smuggler or a criminal trying to escape.

MRS. D. (*sniffs*). Then he must be a capital actor, for he appeared almost irritatingly calm and self-posessed.

TONY. A slick article is on to all those tricks.

ISABEL. Did you say he was coming back, Mrs. Darling?

MRS. D. Yes, he asked my permission to do so.

ISABEL. Then, if he is a fugitive, the revenue officers may arrest him in this house.

EDITH (*in a wail*). And we may all be held on a charge of harboring a criminal.

TONY. Well, if he does return, he will be given a pretty cool reception from yours truly. What with this robbery stunt, you girls are likely to be featured in the papers for the next week. We are in the deuce of a pickle, and I can't suggest a darn thing. (*THE COMMODORE appears at back, comes down at end of TONY's speech*) Hang this nutty old Commodore anyway. If he is on the level, why didn't he speak out like a man. I believe he's a crook.

DICK. Oh, come, Tony, that's hardly fair. He's probably all right, and a good old sport.

COMMODORE (*the COMMODORE comes down, addressing DICK*). Thank you. That's kind and charitable in you, Mr.——

DICK (*confused*). Ah—Daggett, sir.

COMMODORE (*half smiling*). Ah, yes. Watkins would have me believe it was Brayley. (*Turning to TONY*). And you, sir, your annoyance was quite justifiable, Mr.——

TONY (*sharply*). Leslie, sir.

COMMODORE. Ah, yes, Leslie. Another mistake of Watkins'. He mentioned the name Baxter. It is almost surprising that a man with such a nimble fancy did not try and persuade me that your two charming friends were Billie Burke and Mary Pickford. (*A ripple of resentment stirs the other characters*) No offence, I assure you. Bear with me just a moment. From a chance word I gathered as I entered,—most unwittingly, I detest a listener,—I formed the impression that you were all in the meshes of a rather puzzling dilemma. Now possibly I can be of some assistance to you: A mere word of explanation will sometimes straighten a tangle. Quite unintentionally I have surrounded myself with an air of mystery. To your gracious hostess,

I introduced myself as the Commodore, just returned from the West. I will now be more explicit—— (*During the last part of COMMODORE'S speech, MINTON has come DOWN from C. entrance and places his hand on THE COMMODORE'S shoulder*)

MINTON. I am Lieutenant Minton of the revenue cutter Rocket, and place you, Hermann Von Housen, under arrest as a spy. (*Turning to others*) I regret, ladies and gentlemen, that for the present every member of this household must be regarded as under surveillance.

COMMODORE. Say, look here, Lieutenant, you are away off! My name is not Von Housen as these my valued friends will testify. Allow me to present them. This young man (*pointing to DICK*) is Howard Chandler Christy. This young athlete is Jack Dempsey (*pointing to TONY*) This dainty lady (*pointing to ISABEL*) is Billie Burke. This young goddess (*indicating EDITH*) is Mary Pickford. This gracious lady (*indicating MRS. DARLING*) is our resourceful diplomist, Portia. And I? Why, bless your soul, Lieutenant, my name is not Von Housen; I'm William Makepeace Thackeray.

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as ACT I. Time, two days later. Early moonlight beginning to show on water. The breakfast table has been replaced by a smaller one C.*
ENTER WATKINS D.L. *Turns up light and arranges articles on table, etc.*

ENTER from French window MRS. DARLING wearing motor coat, etc.

MRS. D. The young people are late, Watkins, I am becoming almost worried. (*A shrug and laugh*) The excitement of the past two days I believe has ruffled my nerves.

WATKINS. They may have stopped at an inn for a bite of supper on their return trip from the city.

MRS. D. It is possible; I have ordered Hodge to bring

around the runabout. I am going for a spin up the road. I may meet them.

WATKINS. Yes, Mrs. Darling, I will see if the car is at the door. (WATKINS holds D.L. open, follows MRS. DARLING out. Slight pause)

ENTER SOPHIE at back. Takes swift glance around room, then returns to window, keeping in shadow of same, as if watching departure of car, the "choo choo" of which is heard dying away in distance. Then comes DOWN C. of room and looks at D.L., through which WATKINS ENTERS. On seeing her, starts, his face hardens.

SOPHIE. Hello, Wattie, my boy! (Nasty laugh) Have I given you a turn? You don't seem overjoyed to see me.

WATKINS. I'm not. I thought you were in England.

SOPHIE. Well, you see you've got another guess coming.

WATKINS. How did you get in here?

SOPHIE. Through the window yonder, how'd you suppose, down the chimney? You're a fine one to leave in charge of a house. Wattie, you're still a dough head.

WATKINS. What do you want? Nothing good I'll wager!

SOPHIE (mockingly). Now Wattie, that's unkind.

WATKINS. Oh, I haven't forgotten the nasty frame-up you and your pals put over on me at The Cecil.

SOPHIE. I can't see you've got any kick coming. The bull didn't get you, (Walking about room) and it looks as if you had tumbled into a pretty snug berth.

WATKINS. I was never in service at a better place.

SOPHIE. It looks it. (Glancing about) Do they know here that you were a waiter at The Cecil? (Grins)

WATKINS (angered). Say! If you've come here expecting me to buy your silence, you're going to get left.

SOPHIE. Good for you, Wattie! Gee, but you're getting brave. (Suddenly puts hand under skirt, and flashes out gilt beaded purse, and points it at him. With half stifled cry he drops into chair) But you get

scared too easy. (*Laughs*) I see you haven't changed much, I thought perhaps you hadn't.

WATKINS. Well, have your say, Sophie, and get out.

SOPHIE. Sure that's the talk, let's get down to cases. (*Sits close in front of him*) Listen, you've got a soft berth here, and Mrs. Darling is a good soul, and you wouldn't want to see her and her friends get done. That's right, I knew you wouldn't. Listen. There was an old geezer called here the other morning, who called himself the Commodore, played a John Drew part, a rich and respectable gent, well, he ain't one nor the other, rich nor respectable.

WATKINS. He's the master of a fine yacht, and I believe he's a gentleman.

SOPHIE. Nothing to it. The yacht was borrowed. I'll bet he didn't give his right name? (*She watches him narrowly*)

WATKINS. I don't know that he gave any name. He went away with an officer from a revenue cutter.

SOPHIE. Sure he did, and I'll give you the straight dope. The officer was mistaken. He's no more a spy than I am, he proved it and they released him, that's something you *didn't* know. His game is something quite different.

WATKINS. See here, Sophie, what's all this talk leading to; you've got an axe to grind, so come to it.

SOPHIE. Right-o. You could use a second girl here, couldn't you, Wattie?

WATKINS. Maybe—but not you.

SOPHIE. Oh, I think you could. If you couldn't, perhaps Mrs. Darling wouldn't care to keep in her employ a butler named Watterson, discharged from The Cecil under the suspicion of theft.

WATKINS. So blackmail is your game!

SOPHIE. That's always been my lay. I was never a thief, you know that. Plain stealing is neither genteel nor artistic. We've got the drop on each other, so what's the good of mincing matters?

WATKINS. What's the idea wanting to come here as a maid?

SOPHIE. To see how Mrs. Darling does up her back

hair. (*Grins*) To do a little quiet work for a party that's willing to pay me well.

WATKINS. If you want to come here to spy on Mrs. Darling, damn you, there's nothing doing, that's flat. She's treated me white——

SOPHIE. Here, here, Wattie, hold your horses; Mrs. Darling don't figure in this at all. It's one of your guests I want to keep tabs on, and that Johnny-off-the-yacht man.

WATKINS. It don't sound true. Him? He's liable never to show up here again. He dropped in to telephone——

SOPHIE. Wattie, you're easy. That telephone business was all a blind. I know his sort. (*With marked significance*) Mrs. Darling is a rich widow and a good looker. He'll drop in again.

WATKINS. Who's the guest you're after?

SOPHIE. Young Brayley. Maybe he's entitled to some money, and maybe he ain't. Maybe he's married and maybe he ain't.

WATKINS. I can tell you that he is.

SOPHIE. Go on, you're kidding.

WATKINS. There's his wife's picture on the mantel. (*Pointing to photos*)

SOPHIE (*goes over to them*). Which one of the dolls?

WATKINS. The one in the gilt frame, she's an actress.

SOPHIE (*lays down her purse on mantel, when she takes up photo*). She's a good looker; what's her stage name?

WATKINS. Lilla Hampton.

SOPHIE (*her face registers consternation*). Ha! And I'll bet the other one is Nancy Merrill. Holy Gee, but here's a go. (*Laughs to cover her agitation. Picks up photo of NANCY MERRILL*) Say, Wattie, do you think we look alike?

WATKINS. No. She's a lady.

SOPHIE (*takes up picture of MISS HAMPTON*). So that's Dick Brayley's wife, and she's down here, just think of that. (*Turns away with shrug*) Well, it's a mighty pleasant place. (*In her confusion she leaves her purse on mantel. She walks about room, but speaks*

with a far less confident air) Too bad, Wattie, you can't run me in as a second girl, but if you can't, why you can't.

WATKINS (*suspiciously*). I didn't say I couldn't. Perhaps I might. (*Coming closer*) You say you would be well paid, do I get a share?

SOPHIE. Sure. If I decide to come. (*Going towards window*)

WATKINS. Where can I reach you if I find I can work the trick?

SOPHIE. Sea Gull House. I'm maid (*Grins*) to a lady stopping there lately arrived. (*With attempt at her old jaunty air*) Caught sight of you as we went by in the car, and thought you might feel slighted if I didn't call. (*Grins*) But it's time for me to vanish. It's mum about my being here.

WATKINS. I'm not likely to mention it.

SOPHIE. Perhaps, but sometimes you get rattled. (*Honk of auto heard in distance. She starts and hurries to window*) Ta ta, Wattie! (*She laughingly blows kiss and EXITS quickly*)

WATKINS (*watches her out. Then goes over to vase where TONY put clipping; takes it out, glances over it, smiles. As he returns it to vase, notices purse left by SOPHIE. At a loss what to do with it, becomes rattled. Telephone bell rings violently. He hurries over to answer call*) Yes. This is 352 Hempstead.—Yes, sir.—No, sir.—Mrs. Darling is out just now, sir.—Expect her in shortly.—Mr. John Wrasper.—Quite right, sir.—Very good, sir.—Mr. Brayley will probably be in directly. Very good, sir. (*Hangs up receiver. Voices heard outside. He, still holding purse, is seized with panic, seeking some place to hide it. Hurries over to vase and crams it in, just as MRS. DARLING ENTERS D.L. followed by DICK and ISABEL.*)

MRS. D. Perhaps I am very dense, Dick, but I can make neither head nor tail of what you have been trying to tell me. Mr. Wrasper sends for you, and you find he's away, and Murray Talbot has left the country. Now tell the rest, Dick, and tell it slowly. (*Business of handing their wraps to WATKINS*)

DICK. No, you are not dense, it's more involved than a problem in Euclid.

MRS. D. I got part of it, and it reminded me of the old nursery rhyme, "I went to Toffie's house, Toffie wasn't home."

WATKINS. I beg pardon, Mrs. Darling, but a Mr. Wrasper 'phoned to say that he would call here directly.

DICK. That's odd.

ISABEL. Perhaps he will supply the last line of the couplet, "Toffie came to my house and stole a marrow bone."

MRS. D. I would like to see him try it. Now Dick, once more. Cut details, I want just bare facts.

DICK. Wrasper not at office. Away on vacation. Partner tells me that their client, Talbot, on being sent my address, starts pell-mell for here. The next thing they hear from him, he has taken a steamer, they think for Europe. Been cabled for by his son.

ISABEL. Which settles the question of the Commodore not being Talbot.

DICK. Yes, and that is about all that has been cleared up. In respect to my personal interests, the Wrasper people I fancy know a great deal more than they chose to impart. I have a hunch that a hitch has arisen about my being the long lost heir. The whole thing looked phony to me from the first.

MRS. D. Well, up to the present time I have led a calm and eminently sane existence, but now I feel as if I had suddenly been drawn into the plot of a moving picture drama. Goodness knows the nature of the next picture to be flashed on the screen, it will probably be——

WATKINS (*announces*). Mr. Wrasper.

MRS. D. By all means, show Mr. Wrasper in.

[EXIT WATKINS *back*.

MRS. D. See! Not a hitch in the performance. (*Rising*) Of course, Dick, I will leave you alone to talk business.

DICK. Please do not, I much prefer——

ENTER WRASPER *back*.

MRS. D. (*bows*). Mr. Wrasper?

WRASPER. Mrs. Darling, I presume. And this, doubtless, is Mr. Richard Brayley?

DICK. Yes, sir. And this is Mrs. Brayley. (*Presents ISABEL*)

WRASPER. Charmed to meet Mrs. Brayley.

MRS. D. This is a favorite chair with men generally, Mr. Wrasper, perhaps you will prove no exception.

WRASPER. Thank you, Mrs. Darling. (*They all sit*) A most delightful location you have here, Mrs. Darling. The view from the upper windows must be superb.

MRS. D. Yes, we find it so.

WRASPER. I have not the slightest doubt of it. Hem. I wish to apologize at once, Mr. Brayley, for not keeping my appointment with you at my office, but Mrs. Wrasper's health was threatened, and her physician ordered an immediate change of air so we hurried down here to the shore, but perhaps we can talk business outside of my office. You received a letter from me a short time ago on a little matter regarding your late father's interest in a mine?

DICK. And its general contents was rather a surprise to me, for you see I never heard my father speak——

MRS. D. (*who is sitting a little behind WRASPER, shakes her head at DICK*). Pardon me, gentlemen, for interrupting, but I fancy you prefer to talk over your business affairs alone. (*Rises, as if to leave*)

DICK. Pray do not leave us, Mrs. Darling! There are to be no family skeletons exhumed, and your advice is always valuable.

MRS. D. Thank you, Dick. But Mr. Wrasper will constitute your advisory board.

WRASPER (*adjusts glasses, produces documents*). This affair presents some unusual—I might say, unique features. The salient points I mentioned in my letter regarding Mr. Murray Talbot and your late father being joint partners in a mine, known as the Early Crow Mine, which had been practically abandoned, but recently operated with most gratifying results. It is then

that Mr. Talbot writes us, and through your club, we are able to get in communication with you. Here is his letter, it may interest you to glance over it. (*Hands letter. Business of WRASPER looking over his papers. DICK and MRS. DARLING read letter*)

DICK. Yes—it is indeed interesting.

MRS. D. Though peculiar, Mr. Talbot's signature denotes a strong character, does it not?

WRASPER. Yes, that was my inference. Though at various times our firm has acted as Mr. Talbot's attorney, I have never had the pleasure of meeting the man personally. And now, Mr. Brayley, we come to a crucial point, which will make your claim to your father's fortune clear and legal. Have you in your possession any document—it might be in the form of stock certificate, or written agreement between your father and Mr. Talbot, in reference to their joint ownership in the Early Crow Mine?

DICK. I regret to say that I found nothing of that nature among his papers.

WRASPER. Ah. Indeed, that is unfortunate.

MRS. D. Of course, Mr. Wrasper, my knowledge of such matters is very limited, but if such a document cannot be found, is there any law to prevent Mr. Brayley, his father's sole heir, from coming into possession of the accumulated profits from the mine?

WRASPER. As you put it, in the abstract, no. But supposing that Mr. Brayley Sr.—we will say pressed for money—sold his share in the supposed exhausted mine?

DICK (*eagerly*). Have you any reason to believe that such a transaction took place?

WRASPER. N—o. And perhaps yes. I do not care to commit myself until I have made a more searching investigation, and perhaps talked with Mr. Talbot. I will say this much—a certain party we have in mind, we believe might have been in a position—hem—at one time to drive a hard bargain with Mr. Brayley, Sr., and this man has recently returned from the West, and indirectly—so I am told—has been making vague inquiries which might implicate your interests. And we believe

we are in a position to prove that this man, in more than one instance, has taken unfair, I might say illegal, methods to force his victims to transfer to him their interests in certain ventures for a beggarly sum.

DICK. I am afraid I can see the end of my dream. I'm sorry.

MRS. D. Mr. Wrasper, if such a catastrophe as you suggest arises, would your firm be willing to take the case in Mr. Brayley's interests?

WRASPER. Every attorney, I fancy, is willing to accept new and desirable clients, Mrs. Darling, but I feel constrained to say, that the hypothetical case we have in mind might incur the expenditure of quite an amount of money in the way of research and investigation, but of course if Mr. Brayley is in a position——

DICK. Which I am sorry to say I am not.

MRS. D. Now see here, Dick, if you will allow me——

DICK. I anticipate your generous offer, Mrs. Darling, but could not think of accepting it.

WRASPER. I actually believe Mr. Brayley could take into court a very promising case, in fact I think so well of his chances of success, that I am almost tempted to make him a proposition.

DICK. I should be very glad to hear it.

WRASPER. I was going to suggest, that perhaps if you were willing to consent to Mrs. Darling assuming the responsibility of all or a part of the expenses incidental to searching investigation, I might consent taking your case—to use an ugly word—on speculation. If we lose, there is always that contingency to be reckoned with—I receive nothing. If we win—it would seem to me ten per cent. of the amount secured for you would not be an exorbitant fee. (*Smiles blandly*)

DICK. No, it would not. Will you give me a little time to consider the proposition?

WRASPER (*rising*). Certainly, Mr. Brayley. I am stopping for the present with my family at the Sea Gull, you can reach me at any time on the 'phone. I promised Mrs. Wrasper I would not be long, so I think I will have to say good evening. Delighted to have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Darling and Mrs. Brayley.

(*Going*) I trust we may become better acquainted, Mr. Brayley, at least in a business way. Good evening.

[EXIT, *bowing* D.L., DICK *following him*.

DICK (*coming DOWN*). Well, by George, I've changed my opinions concerning lawyers. Mr. Wrasper certainly seems disposed to act white, but I still protest, Mrs. Darling, about you risking a single penny in my behalf.

MRS. D. (*quietly*). I don't intend risking a single penny.

ISABEL (*at first registers surprise, then brightening*). Oh, I see, you think Dick's chances of winning are so sure, that no risk is involved.

MRS. D. (*whimsically*). Would you two like to have me tell you what I really think?

DICK.

ISABEL. } Why, yes, of course.

MRS. D. In the first place, I think you two children ought to have a guardian or nurse to see that you don't fall into the fire, swallow pins, or run away and turn cowboys. That's my first think; and, furthermore—notwithstanding—know-all-men-by-these-presents, I think Mr. Wrasper is about the most plausible scamp it has ever been my misfortune to meet.

ISABEL. Why—why, Mrs. Darling, what can you mean?

MRS. D. I mean I'm using my woman's intuition, my common sense, seasoned with a pinch of worldly experience, and garnished with good sound logic! This certain party I have in mind (*Imitating WRASPER'S voice*), this mysterious man, whose sole business in life it would appear is to rob the weak and unfortunate, is a myth. Mr. Wrasper thought he saw a chance to make some easy money. He would make a great ado about investigation, ultimately find your claim perfectly sound and legal, and then collect his ten per cent. for doing nothing. In short, Wrasper came to my house to steal a marrow bone, and *there won't be no bone!* Ugh! These smooth rascals irritate me. (*Walking about*)

DICK. Pardon me, but I can't agree with you. The fact is I haven't a scrap of paper to show that father ever owned a penny in the Early Crow Mine.

ISABEL. But Mr. Talbot, who was his partner, says he did.

DICK. Perhaps he did at one time but, as Wrasper pointed out, father might have sold his interest quite unknown to Talbot.

ISABEL (*sadly*). To this man just returned from the West.

MRS. D. Man, fiddlesticks! A hundred men have recently returned from the West.

DICK (*warmly*). Yes, including that fictitious old Commodore, whom you seem not to mistrust.

ISABEL. The Commodore! It might be he.

MRS. D. For pity's sake, who next will you accuse that delightful old Commodore of being. First you were sure he was Murray Talbot. Then a detective sent down here by that credulous old goose, Dexter; then a smuggler and an escaped criminal, and a spy, and——

DICK. I am not so sure but what Isabel may be on the right track. Working along the lines of elimination, we know he's not Talbot, for *he's* on the high seas. Nor a detective, for they rarely own a thirty-thousand-dollar yacht, or a spy, for we saw him return to his yacht, and the cutter sail away, so you see it might easily be——

MRS. D. losing patience. "How old is Ann!" "Button, button, who's got the button?" Let's start a new game, Who's got the Commodore! Sometimes, Dick dear, you almost get on my nerves. (*Honk of auto heard outside*) Thank goodness, here come Edith and Tony. Perhaps they can solve the riddle Who's got the Commodore.

DICK. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they could, for without I am very much mistaken they are bringing the Commodore back with them.

ENTER *at back* EDITH, *followed by the* COMMODORE
and TONY.

TONY (*talking as they enter*). A twenty-foot yacht is the most common in these waters. Of course your's is much larger.

EDITH. We overtook the Commodore on his way here, and persuaded him to share our car.

COMMODORE. And I trust that Mrs. Darling will be equally gracious to a comparative stranger, and grant him an opportunity of establishing his innocence. (*The first part of the following scene is played in a light, bantering vein between MRS. DARLING and the COMMODORE*)

MRS. D. A prisoner, I believe, is always given the benefit of the doubt until he is proven guilty.

COMMODORE. You are most kind and encouraging, Mrs. Darling. (*Bowing*)

MRS. D. And from what special sins would you seek absolution? I trust it is not a case of an accusing conscience?

COMMODORE. No, indeed, but being something of a deductionist, I can readily see how a chain of unfortunate circumstances might have induced you to charge me with trespass, high treason and a close kinship with the notorious Machiavelli.

MRS. D. Well, you see I have not made recourse to habeas corpus proceedings. As you have appeared before us of your own volition it is a point in your favor. Won't you be seated, Commodore? Mr. and Mrs. Baxter are presumably your allies, and perhaps you can win the faith and good will of Mr. and Mrs. Brayley. (*They all sit*) Now I think we are ready to listen to your plea.

COMMODORE. In defence of the first charge, intrusion—ah, thereby hangs a tale. As I mentioned, Mrs. Darling, in our brief interview, I have recently returned from the West. While on the train as we neared New York, I was cleverly drawn into conversation with two young women, and most unfortunately for me—(*Suppressed excitement on part of listeners*)

TONY (*impulsively*). Are—you Mr. Dexter?

COMMODORE. So you have read of my misadventure in the papers?

TONY. Why—well, yes, I fancy so.

COMMODORE. Then I will take up my story where the paper left off. On discovering that I had been robbed, I placed my case in the hands of a private detective. For certain reasons I deferred the business which had

brought me East, and chartered a yacht for a cruise. The other morning, a launch passed close to the *Vixen*, and among its passengers I recognized one of the young women who robbed me. Through my glasses I traced the launch to the landing of the Sea Gull hotel. Seized with a sudden impulse to notify my detective without delay, I begged the privilege of using Mrs. Darling's telephone, which I was prevented from doing by a signal from my sailing master. On returning to this house, I—I was given the impression that—the present company was in a state of mild panic. I was about to make due explanation, when that officious lieutenant appeared on the scene and——

TONY. And spilled the beans. I beg pardon——

EDITH. Tony!

COMMODORE. You are quite right, Mr. Baxter, spilled the beans. I could not but help feeling that I in a measure was responsible for you all being placed in an embarrassing position, yet the absurdity of the whole affair appealed to my sense of humor. Of course the Lieutenant knew I was chaffing him, but the tension had to be broken somehow. (*All laugh*)

MRS. D. You have handled your defence admirably, Commodore, and, I think, (*Turning to company*) stand vindicated. (*Company smiles and nods*)

COMMODORE. Thank you.

ISABEL. But I am all impatient to hear the denouement. Of course you have had the female Raffles arrested, and, I trust, recovered your property.

COMMODORE. N—o. (*With shrug and half laugh*) I sincerely wish the tabloid melodrama had been brought to such a satisfactory curtain.

MRS. D. Then she is still at liberty, free to rob someone else?

COMMODORE. I scarcely think she will attempt another coup. She is at present under strict surveillance, and yet—her audacity is amazing.

TONY. What's the idea?

COMMODORE. My detective entertained the hope that she might be joined or communicate with her clever accomplice, and by that ruse—as he expressed it—bag

both the jail birds.

TONY. Your man is on to his job all right.

DICK. I am quite curious to know which member of the team of Hampton and Merrill this young woman claimed to be.

COMMODORE. Miss Merrill; the spurious Miss Hampton was by far the more clever and attractive of the pair. (*Amused glances exchanged among group, which puzzle the COMMODORE*)

MRS. D. I seem to feel intuitively, Commodore, that perhaps you may have another, and more involved, reason for permitting this girl to remain at liberty. Am I becoming too clever? (*Laughs*)

COMMODORE (*studying her face with a glance*). No, Mrs. Darling, in fact I find myself confronted by a situation so delicate, so puzzling, as to cause me to question the sincerity of more than one in whom I had the utmost confidence.

MRS. D. (*archly*). A suspicious person might almost detect a personal note lurking in your rather vague confession. (*Mocking laugh*)

COMMODORE. The challenge in your laugh almost tempts me to borrow a shaft from your quiver of repartee, and ask, is it an instance of an accusing conscience?

MRS. D. (*surprised, and a little indignant*). An accusing conscience? I—I—really fail to catch the—point of the joke, for of course your question is open to no other construction. Will you kindly be a little less obscure?

COMMODORE. Yes, as you request it, I believe it would be only just to you, your friends and to me that I speak freely, and by way of preface I would ask, are you acquainted with the actress Nancy Merrill?

MRS. D. (*coolly*). The real, or the counterfeit?

COMMODORE. The real, Mrs. Darling.

MRS. D. Yes, intimately.

COMMODORE. Has she been a recent visitor here?

MRS. D. Yes, very recently.

COMMODORE. I am glad to know that, it at least cuts one knot in the complication. I assume you are not

aware that the counterfeit Miss Merrill was seen entering this house not an hour ago. (*Ripple of excitement stirs company*)

MRS. D. No. I was not, and if this be true, I think you will admit it was most reprehensible for your man to allow this girl to be at large.

COMMODORE. I deserve all the censure, Mrs. Darling. The detective, stung by the girl's audacity, was keen for seizing her as she left your house; I restrained him. She was on your premises, and I wished to spare you any further annoyance on the score of my personal affairs.

MRS. D. (*more graciously*). That was very considerate in you.

COMMODORE. I—I trust I am not bungling on extremely delicate ground, Mrs. Darling, in calling your attention to the obvious fact that this girl must be on terms of intimacy with *some* inmate of your house, for she remained here some little time.

DICK. An acquaintance of one of the maids, perhaps.

COMMODORE. Perhaps, but she was seen to enter and leave by that window. (*Indicating window at back*) And I fancy you do not permit the maids to receive their callers in this room.

DICK. Why—no, decidedly not.

MRS. D. Pardon me, sir, but I am beginning to resent the attitude you seem bent on assuming on this affair. Are you trying to make it appear that some member of my household is a confidant of thieves?

COMMODORE. No. I am trying to be your friend.

DICK. You say it was within the hour that the girl was seen at this house. She may have gained access while we were all away.

MRS. D. But Watkins rarely leaves this floor, and he knew we were out motoring. He may be stupid at times, but he is faithful to the last degree.

TONY. The most sensible thing it would seem to me to do, would be to question Watkins.

MRS. D. Yes, of course. (*Touches bell*) This whirlpool of excitement has paralyzed my wits. I never believed in hoodoos before.

TONY. There sure is a jinx hovering near.

ENTER WATKINS D.L.

MRS. D. Were you on this floor all evening, Watkins?

WATKINS. I never left it for a moment, except to see you to your car, Mrs. Darling.

MRS. D. Did any one call in my absence?

WATKINS. Yes, Mrs. Darling, Mr. Wrasper on the telephone.

MRS. D. And are you sure you remained in this room after receiving Mr. Wrasper's message?

WATKINS. Every instant. Pardon me, but perhaps you will recall finding me here on your return.

DICK (to TONY). That's right.

MRS. D. (*with a note of triumph in her voice*). And if anyone had entered—we will say by that window, you could not but help seeing them?

WATKINS. Why—no, Mrs. Darling. I was standing by the window much of the time, and I positively saw no one enter by the window or door.

MRS. D. Very well, that will do, Watkins.

WATKINS. Thank you, Mrs. Darling. [EXIT, D.L.]

MRS. D. And I can vouch for no stranger being admitted—except Mr. Wrasper—after my return. Your detective, Commodore, could scarcely mistake him for the bogus Miss Merrill?

COMMODORE (*perplexed*). Scarcely. So Mr. Wrasper called here. (*Mirthless laugh*) Well, to use a trite expression, the mystery deepens.

MRS. D. Really, Commodore, you appear to be a genius for developing mysteries. I am afraid recent associations with your astute detective has made you unduly suspicious. (*Laughs*) It is ungenerous, I know, to exult at another's discomfort, but don't you think it possible you may have been laboring under several delusions?

COMMODORE (*reflectively*). I am beginning to believe that perhaps I have. Mr. Baxter, do you recall that in the account you read of my being robbed, that any mention was made of the future plans of the fictitious Mr. Dexter? I have a special reason in asking.

TONY. I—don't recall that there was. I think I have the clipping right here. (*Goes over to mantel and*

brings vase to table; begins pulling out papers, and soon discovers the purse placed there by WATKINS) Whose is this? You women are the limit. First thing a howl will go up that you have been robbed. *(Throws purse on table)* Ah, yes, here's the clipping. *(Begins reading it to himself. ISABEL and EDITH come to table, and examine purse)*

EDITH. It certainly is not mine.

ISABEL. I never had one even like it.

COMMODORE *(with quiet sarcasm)*. Perhaps it belongs to one of the maids.

MRS. D. *(who has joined the group)*. Let me see it. Perhaps there is a card inside. *(Business of opening it)* Quite a roll of bills, and a small package. Feels—like—pills. *(Opens package)* Why, they look like—uncut stones!

COMMODORE. They are. I brought them on from the West.

TONY. Well, what the——

COMMODORE. It was really very kind in Miss Merrill to return my property. *(Quiet laugh)* She certainly adopts unique methods in plying her profession.

MRS. D. You still insist she was here?

COMMODORE. It would seem to me we have undeniable proof. *(Takes stones and places them in package)* They were—appropriated by the deft fingers of Miss Hampton or Miss Merrill; is not the deduction simple? But—Umph.—When calling here did Mr. Wrasper happen to go near that vase?

MRS. D. *(losing patience)*. No. Can it be possible you are trying to implicate Mr. Wrasper in this affair?

COMMODORE. It would not be beyond the bounds of possibility.

MRS. D. I am becoming tired of all this fencing in the dark, I prefer to fight in the open.

COMMODORE. I gladly accept your challenge, and invite any questions you choose to ask.

MRS. D. Are you acquainted with Mr. Wrasper?

COMMODORE. In a business way, yes. In the past he was the Eastern attorney for several mine owners. At one time I employed him.

DICK (*eagerly*). Then you have been interested in mines. Could it be possible you know anything about a mine known as the Early Crow?

COMMODORE. I think so. It has been known of late as the Resurrection mine. It was originally owned and operated by a man named Talbot, and a partner, Carlton Brayley; these facts are well known in mining circles.

DICK (*eagerly*). Perhaps you may regard it as an idle question, but were you ever acquainted with this Murray Talbot, or Mr. Brayley?

COMMODORE (*serious note in his voice*). No, it is not an idle question. This is a small world after all. I have known Talbot intimately for many years. I trust I am not betraying his confidence when I say that the sudden death of Brayley was a staggering blow to him. The partners, I believe, had quarrelled, and when it was too late Talbot discovered that he had done his old friend a terrible wrong. When the Early Crow sprang into life, it was Talbot's intention to come East, and make every effort to ascertain if Brayley had any heirs living, and if so, make reparation for the wrong he had done a man worthy his highest esteem and respect.

DICK (*with show of emotion*). Carlton Brayley was my father, sir. Mr. Talbot did come East, but was unexpectedly summoned to Europe, his son wounded somewhere in France, so Mr. Wrasper's clerk informed me.

COMMODORE. Mr. Brayley, what you tell me interests me deeply.

ENTER WATKINS, D.L.

WATKINS. Pardon me, sir, this note has just come for Mr. Brayley. The messenger is waiting for an answer. (*Hands DICK note*)

DICK. For me? (*To company*) Will you excuse me? (*Opens note and reads*) It is from Mr. Wrasper. (*Reads*) It is—rather surprising—he wants me to make an appointment to meet him here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock! He writes he has just learned that the dangerous party to whom he alluded is likely to make serious trouble unless immediate steps are taken to prevent

him. (MRS. DARLING *sniffs*) That's bad. In a post-script he adds, "It is reported that the steamer on which Talbot sailed has been torpedoed!" (*Turning to* MRS. DARLING *hopelessly*) What's the use of making an appointment if Talbot is lost?

MRS. D. Do as you think best, Dick. I am afraid my advice is of little value.

COMMODORE. Pardon me, Mr. Brayley, I do not wish to again appear as an intruder, but I do earnestly wish that you would consent to make this appointment. And—and I would be very glad if you would permit me to be present at this interview; I believe I can be of real service to you.

DICK (*for an instant studying the COMMODORE's face*). I appreciate and accept your offer. I will write Wrasper to come. (*Goes up towards desk L.C. The COMMODORE meets him and grasps his hand*)

COMMODORE. Thank you, Brayley, and don't be discouraged. (*The COMMODORE crosses in front of DICK, goes over and picks up "Vanity Fair" left by TONY, casually reads title. DICK goes to desk and writes note, which he hands to WATKINS who EXITS, D.L. COMMODORE comes DOWN, consulting watch*) It is getting late, and we have had an exciting evening. (*Smiles*) I am most grateful to you for so graciously receiving a world-wanderer within your charming circle. And Mrs. Darling, will you indulge a vagary of mine by consenting to read before retiring—say chapter fifteen in "Vanity Fair." Its satirical humor I have found to be a wonderful tranquilizer for nerves.

MRS. D. (*laughs*). A novel request certainly, Commodore. I never heard of Thackeray being prescribed as a bromide. But to be indulgent I will try the experiment.

COMMODORE. Thank you. (*Going*) The contents of Miss Merrill's purse I will leave for the present in your keeping. Then till to-morrow morning at ten! Au revoir.

[EXIT, D.L.]

TONY. Well, talk about your continuous performances, there has been more head-line stuff pulled off here to-night than——

MRS. D. (*at table, head buried in hands. Looks up, speaks almost crossly*). Please don't any of you say another word. My head is in a whirl.

ISABEL (*taking DICK's arm and leading him towards D.R.*). Come, Dick, Mrs. Darling is very tired. (*Signals to TONY and EDITH to follow, which they do. TONY the very last*)

TONY (*as he EXITS*). All right, I'm coming, but I would give up quite a few yellow backs to know who put that purse in that vase. [EXIT, D.R.]

MRS. D. (*slight pause. She raises her head, sighs, notices purse and package of stones in front of her, reflects an instant, then smiles, looks around to see if any one is about, extracts contents of purse, and places it with stones in concealment about person. Rises and places purse in sideboard drawer. Takes vase, and replaces it in original place on mantel and returns to seat at table*)

ENTER WATKINS, D.L., *keeping his eyes on MRS. DARLING. Glides over and slips note in "Vanity Fair."* Then coughs to attract attention.

MRS. D. (*starting up*). Watkins, close up the house at once. And be sure every door and window is doubly locked, for we are likely to be visited by Raffles, Arsene Lupin, The Artful Dodger and—Banquo's ghost!

WATKINS (*utterly bewildered*). Very good, Mrs. Darling, just so. [EXIT MRS. DARLING, D.L.]

WATKINS *goes up, closes and locks French window, looks cautiously about and hurries over to vase. The curtains at the curtained entrance part and MRS. DARLING's face appears. She watches WATKINS while he is searching the vase. When he discovers the loss of the purse his face registers surprise and alarm. As he turns and comes DOWN and switches off the light, MRS. DARLING's face disappears. He then EXITS D.L. Slight pause. MRS. DARLING RE-ENTERS cautiously, goes over to sideboard, takes empty purse and puts it in vase.Laughs softly. Snaps the searchlight she carries. Goes over to bookcase, takes up copy of "Vanity Fair" and opens*

it. The note left in it by WATKINS drops out. She picks it up, goes to table, turns on light and opens note. At first her face registers surprise, then amusement. Laughing, makes EXIT D.L., her shoulders still shaking with suppressed laughter.

SLOW CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE:—MRS. DARLING'S library. Next morning. Doors R. and L.; bay window with window seat C. of rear flat with bookcase on each side of it. Mantelpiece DOWN L. Library table DOWN C. Chairs as may be desired. DISCOVERED TONY in window seat reading "*Vanity Fair*." He looks up from book, nods his head wisely as if making discovery and then resumes his reading.

ENTER EDITH, D.R.

EDITH. What, Tony dear, in here all by your lonesome, and it is such a perfect morning for tennis?

TONY. Yes, having a little session with "*Vanity Fair*." Remember I told you I was going to take up serious reading.

EDITH (*looks over his shoulder at book*). You surely have not read the two hundred and first page this morning? You must be a rapid reader, Tony, (*Grins*) or a terrible skipper.

TONY. Oh, I don't know. (*Lays down book*) See here, Tootsie, I want to have a talk, and see if you can decide whether your hubby is a pretty shrewd boy, or is chasing toy balloons.

EDITH. Ease your mind, Tony, ease your mind.

TONY. That's precisely what I wish I could do. (*Gets up, walks about*) Now I have done a whole lot of thinking this morning, and have arrived nowhere. To put it bluntly, the problem is this. Some one is a pretty slick article, and I can't decide whether it's Watkins, this Mr. Wrasper or the Commodore, but I am willing

to bet a large red apple that at least one of that trio knows who put that purse in that vase.

EDITH (*comes down and sits at table*). The Commodore virtually proved that my counterfeit Nancy Merrill must have done the trick.

TONY. And Watkins declares that no one entered the room, and I'm inclined to believe Watkins, and for this reason. A clever crook as this girl evidently is, would never take the chance of being pinched, by coming to this house and leaving stolen goods, which belonged to a man living on a yacht a mile or so away. It doesn't listen right.

EDITH. Yes, that's so, and I very much doubt if Watkins is clever or nervy enough to be the pal of a crook. But I cannot possibly see how Mr. Wrasper or the Commodore could in any way be connected with this affair. Isabel tells me that Wrasper made a short business call, and was under the watchful eyes of Dick and Mrs. Darling every minute, especially Mrs. Darling, for she mistrusts him through and through.

TONY. There you are! Oh, Mrs. Darling is some wise guyist.

EDITH. And as for the Commodore, we were all present every minute he was here, why should you for a moment suspect him? I rather like the Commodore.

TONY. So do I, and I believe he is sincere in offering to help Dick, but yet he doesn't say or do things right out in the open. For instance, as far as I am aware, none of us actually knows his real name. Supposing any one should ask you, he's Commodore who, which or what? (*Grins*) Of course telling the revenue officer he was William Makepeace Thackeray was all a bluff, just to keep the officer guessing. Then his asking Mrs. Darling to read the fifteenth chapter in "Vanity Fair" was decidedly cryptic. Do you get me?

EDITH. Yes, but I can't see that you are getting much on the Commodore. Humph—I never thought of that before, we really *don't* know his name, *do* we? How funny.

TONY. I wonder if Mrs. Darling does?

EDITH (*slowly*). She—may, if there was some secret

to be conveyed in her reading a certain chapter in the book, she must. One can't—crypt all alone, can they?

TONY. No, not usually. Now I don't know whether she has read that certain chapter yet or not, but little Tony for the last hour has been doing just that very thing, and I fancy I have stumbled on a find.

EDITH. Not really! Oh, Tony, how tremendously clever you are.

TONY (*closing one eye knowingly*). If the opening lines in the chapter *do* mean anything, then the Commodore must be sentimentally cracked. Just list to this, and he has only known Mrs. Darling three days. Please remember, that the previous chapter ends with Sir Pitt proposing to Bekey Sharp. (*Reads*) "Every reader of a sentimental turn of mind—and we desire no others—must have been pleased with the tableaux with which the last act of our little drama concluded: for what can be prettier than an image of Love on his knees before Beauty?"

EDITH (*shaking her head*). Tony, I am afraid you are not as clever as I credited you with being. It's too remote. The Commodore would never dare to be so—ardent. And yet—did you notice at breakfast how bubbling over with mischief Mrs. Darling was? I caught her more than once laughing to herself. Oh, man, man, how easily you succumb to the light that lies in women's eyes!

TONY. And doesn't the poem go on to say—

"My only books, were women's looks
And folly's all they taught me?"

EDITH. Tony!

TONY (*comes over and puts his arms about her*). But, of course, there are exceptions.

EDITH. Now that you have given me a hint, I am going to study Mrs. Darling carefully, and I believe I can discover if she has read that chapter, and if it caused this ripple of exuberant spirits.

ENTER MRS. DARLING, D.R., *very breezily*.

MRS. D. Oh, you spooneys. (*Laughs*) TONY and EDITH *break away*) Why are you not out of doors this glorious morning? It seems to me I never saw the world so full of sunshine. (*EDITH and TONY exchange nods and glances*) Even the birds seem to be making holiday, and singing love songs. (*Business of scanning books in cases while speaking*)

TONY. Ah, yes. Love kneeling at the feet of Beauty.

EDITH (*turns away to conceal suppressed laughter. More exchange of nods and smiles*). Were you looking for any particular book, Mrs. Darling?

MRS. D. Yes, "Vanity Fair." Weren't you looking it over in the morning room the other day, but I don't seem to find it there?

EDITH (*blankly*). Then—then you haven't read the chapter the Commodore asked you to?

MRS. D. No. My mind was so taken up with other matters last evening, that I forgot all about it. (*Careless tone, keeps on looking. Slight pause*)

TONY (*with grimace at EDITH*). Oh—I believe I'll join Dick and Isabel on the tennis courts. (*Jams hands in pockets, and EXITS, crestfallen, D.R. EDITH sneaks towards D.R.*)

MRS. D. Going, dear? If you see Watkins, please tell him to come in here at once.

EDITH (*weakly*). Yes, Mrs. Darling.

[EXIT, *demurely*, D.R.]

(MRS. DARLING *continues to bustle about room, arranging things here and there. May be singing softly to herself. Takes pens and paper from table drawer*)

ENTER WATKINS, D.R. *Eyes* MRS. DARLING *suspiciously*.

MRS. D. (*rather crisp turn of voice*). Watkins, after ten o'clock I am not to be disturbed. I shall be in this room attending to some important business. I am expecting a lawyer, Mr. Wrasper, and Commodore—Thackeray, and I *may* have to summon a detective to be present at this meeting. I am not sure yet. When they

arrive, conduct the Commodore to the reception room. (*Pointing to D.L.*) Show Mr. Wrasper in here at once. Is that perfectly clear?

WATKINS (*looking frightened*). Yes, Mrs. Darling.

MRS. D. (*seated at table*). Watkins, do you know what an exhibit is?

WATKINS. Why yes—or perhaps no. I attended an exhibit once at the Crystal Palace, London——

MRS. D. No. What I mean is something quite different. In a criminal case, clothing, weapons, purses or any other articles found on, or in the possession of the murdered when brought into court are known as exhibits, and their silent testimony frequently condemns a prisoner—to death. Watkins, in the right-hand vase on the mantel in the morning room, you will find a beaded purse, please bring it to me at once.

WATKINS (*nearly collapses, swallows, unable to speak for an instant*). Y-e-s—Mrs.—Darling, I will endeavor to do so. [EXIT, D.R.]

(MRS. D. *as the door closes behind WATKINS, with difficulty restrains her laughter. At table writes brief note, takes pin from her dress, goes UP to D.L. and if possible gives the impression of pinning it on outside of door. Comes DOWN just as WATKINS ENTERS. Scared "blue," he hands purse to MRS. DARLING*)

MRS. D. (*takes purse and opens it. Her face registers surprise, then frowns at finding it empty. Gives WATKINS searching glance*). What has become of the contents of this purse?

WATKINS. I—really can't say, Mrs. Darling. I brought it direct from the vase to you.

MRS. D. Watkins, did you ever see this purse before taking it from the vase?

WATKINS. I may have done so—I have seen Mrs. Brayley and Mrs. Baxter carrying beaded affairs, but I never noticed them particularly.

MRS. D. This purse does not belong to either Mrs. Brayley or Mrs. Baxter. (*Slowly*) It was placed in that vase last night—by you.

WATKINS (*in mild panic*). Why—yes—Mrs. Darling, a—a—quite right. I do remember finding it, and in—

an absent moment, must have put it in the vase.

MRS. D. (*sharply*). Watkins, you are trying to deceive me. You know to whom this purse belongs, and how it came in this house!

WATKINS (*gasping*). I—I—I——

MRS. D. I am positive that last evening it contained quite a sum of money, and some precious stones and you bring it to me this morning—empty. *Watkins, who brought this purse into this house?*

WATKINS. A—a—an undesirable party.

MRS. D. How did the undesirable party gain access to this house? You told me last night that you neither admitted nor saw anyone enter.

WATKINS. She admitted herself. I found her in the morning room when I returned from seeing you to your car. (*Meekly*)

MRS. D. The young woman must be a friend of yours, as you have virtually lied for her.

WATKINS. I abominate her! She's—a blackmailer. I knew her slightly in the old country. She didn't come here to rob, she came to spy. She is in the hire of a party stopping at the Sea Gull.

MRS. D. This is interesting, Watkins.

WATKINS. I feel sure she will never attempt to come here again. Pardon me, but as we say below stairs, she got her fingers burnt, when she discovered by chance that Mrs. Baxter was also Miss Nancy Merrill. It put her in such a flunk that she left without her purse, and in a moment of excitement I put it in that vase. I hope I did no wrong, Mrs. Darling?

MRS. D. I may overlook it, Watkins, for perhaps you were the victim of circumstances.

WATKINS. Thank you, Mrs. Darling. Quite right. Just so.

MRS. D. What is the young woman's name?

WATKINS. Sophie Kent.

MRS. D. Do you know why, on discovering that Nancy Merrill was visiting here, she was so anxious to make her escape?

WATKINS. I fancy I do. Beg pardon, but I could not help hearing Mr. Baxter read about a man being robbed

on a train by a girl who claimed she was Mrs. Baxter—pardon me, I mean Nancy Merrill, and so I suspected——

MRS. D. Naturally; that will be all, Watkins.

WATKINS. Thank you, Mrs. Darling. Quite right. (EXIT, D.R. MRS. DARLING *laughs to herself. Picks up pencil, makes notes*)

ENTER DICK, D.R.

DICK. Busy? Am I intruding?

MRS. D. No, indeed. Can I hail the conquering hero?

DICK. Conquering nothing. Isabel beat me four sets. I was away off form. (*Nervous laugh*) I must be a little panicky over this meeting with Wrasper.

MRS. D. Naturally. (*They sit at table*) Now see here, Dick, brace up! (*Smiling*) If you don't, when you come into possession of your fortune, you will have to engage me as secretary of your serious affairs.

WATKINS (*announces*). Mr. Wrasper.

ENTER WRASPER, D.R.

WRASPER. Good morning, Mrs. Darling, Mr. Brayley. (*Consulting watch*) I see I am a little ahead of the appointed hour. It has been said that over promptness was one of my many failings.

MRS. D. I believe that punctuality is generally considered a virtue, Mr. Wrasper. (*She indicates chair at back of table*)

WRASPER. Thank you. (*Takes seat*) Doubtless, Mr. Brayley, you were rather surprised on receiving my note last evening, but another one of my characteristics is always to strike when the iron is hot.

MRS. D. I can readily believe that, Mr. Wrasper. (*They are sitting, WRASPER back of table, DICK on his L., MRS. DARLING on his R.*)

WRASPER. I appreciate that you and Mr. Brayley have scarcely had time, to consider fully the proposition I made last evening, but of course you must see the probability of Mr. Talbot being lost on the *Cedwin* may

be far-reaching in its ramifications, and call for prompt action.

MRS. D. Is it positively known that Mr. Talbot was a passenger on the ill-fated steamer?

WRASPER. That was the inference we gathered from the brief note he sent by special messenger to our office.

DICK. I am eager to learn the recent developments at which you hinted in your note.

WRASPER (*guardedly*). Then am I to assume that you have decided to retain me as counsel in this case?

MRS. D. Mr. Brayley and I had rather a spirited argument on the subject and failed to come to an agreement.

WRASPER (*stiffly*). Ah. Yes, I see. That point, of course, must be positively settled before we proceed.

MRS. D. Perhaps we may come to a satisfactory understanding. I will be perfectly frank, Mr. Wrasper. I was the negative factor in the argument, but—after reflection—have decided to capitulate, and will give you a check now if you require it with which to begin your investigation. Is that satisfactory?

WRASPER (*blandly*). Certainly, Mrs. Darling. And now if there are no objections, we will proceed without delay. (*Business of looking over papers*) The chief menacing danger with which we may have to contend is a man known by several aliases. At one time he called himself Lamont. He has also been known as Woodson, and the latest cognomen he appears to have chosen is—Dexter. (*Business of watching the effect of his disclosure on his hearers*)

DICK (*starting*). Dexter! (MRS. DARLING *nods and smiles unperturbed*)

WRASPER. To the outside world he has ever been the suave gentleman. His foresight in buying depreciated stocks has been almost uncanny. Nothing criminal in all this you may say, but the dastardly means to which he has made recourse to bully or swindle his victims out of their holdings has been most questionable. We have been informed that on more than one occasion he approached Mr. Brayley, Sr., doubtless with the view to induce him to dispose of his shares in the Early Crow

mine. Is it irrational in me to fear that Mr. Brayley may have been persuaded to sell his interests in a mine regarded as practically worthless?

DICK (*sadly*). No.

MRS. D. But it seems to me, Mr. Wrasper, you are taking too much for granted. Why, when the Early Crow began to soar, did not this astute speculator come forward with his claim? Then there must be records kept of stock transfers which can be investigated?

WRASPER. All you say, Mrs. Darling, is quite logical. Thorough investigation, that is precisely the line of action I propose to follow. (*He bends over his papers. At that instant the D.L. opens partly, MRS. DARLING raises her eyes, shakes her head, smiling. The door closes softly*)

MRS. D. Mr. Wrasper, I believe there is a maxim among business men, that expenses should always be kept down to a minimum. Am I correct?

WRASPER. Absolutely. A maxim we invariably try to follow in serving our clients.

MRS. D. Then perhaps I can be of some assistance in helping you to maintain your reputation, and incidentally protect my own interests. I have recently made the acquaintance of a mining expert from the West, and he has kindly consented to aid us in the initiatory steps of our investigation. Dick, will you please ask Mr. Thackeray to join us. I think you will find him in the reception room.

DICK (*at first rather bewildered*). Ah—yes—certainly, Mrs. Darling. [EXIT, D.L.]

WRASPER (*his face clouding*). Mr. Thackeray! A mining expert! I would have much preferred that we should have outlined our plans before consulting a stranger.

MRS. D. Oh, I feel quite sure Mr. Thackeray will be of incalculable aid in helping us unravel this tangle.

ENTER, D.L., DICK and the COMMODORE.

MRS. D. Mr. Thackeray, this is Mr. Wrasper, my attorney pro-tem.

COMMODORE. Mr. Wrasper.

WRASPER (*coolly*). Mr. Thackeray.

MRS. D. Won't you sit here? (*Indicating chair L. of table*) And you, Dick. (*Indicating chair R.*) I can find a place anywhere, thank you. I should explain, Mr. Wrasper, that Mr. Thackeray is acquainted with the facts in this case, up to the disclosures you have made this morning. So possibly it may expedite matters if I ask one or two vital questions that we are all burning to have answered, and you, Mr. Wrasper, as my counsel, will see that I hold strictly to the issues at hand, and economize valuable time. Mr. Thackeray, if I understood correctly, you at one time were intimately acquainted with Mr. Murray Talbot and his partner Carleton Brayley, joint owners in the Early Crow mine?

COMMODORE. Yes, Mrs. Darling.

MRS. D. The partners quarrelled and separated, I have been told. Later Mr. Brayley may have sold his interest in the mine without your knowledge.

COMMODORE. I am confident he did not.

WRASPER. What makes you so confident, can you prove it?

COMMODORE. I think so.

WRASPER. How?

MRS. D. If you please, Mr. Wrasper, we will take up that point a little later, (*Laughs*) when I turn my witness over to you. Mr. Thackeray, did you ever know or hear of a stock speculator who at various times used the aliases Lamont; Woodson and later Dexter?

COMMODORE. Yes, I once knew—by reputation—a man who might answer that description. He was a well-known character in mining circles.

MRS. D. Do you know where he could be found at present? I mean, of course, approximately, in the Western or Eastern states?

COMMODORE. I should hate to venture a reply to that question, as to what state,—for you see he has been dead a year or more.

WRASPER. You are mistaken, sir, or maybe he left a son who is carrying on the business under his father's name.

COMMODORE. Or *names*. I sincerely trust he left no issue.

WRASPER. Yes, I admit the man was a black sheep, as I have been explaining to Mr. Brayley.

MRS. D. I should like to ask one more question, which Mr. Wrasper, from a lawyer's viewpoint, and Mr. Thackeray, from his store of practical experience, will doubtless be able to answer conclusively. Does it ever happen that a man will sell his interest in a claim, without the transaction being duly registered or recorded? I doubt if I employ the correct legal terms.

WRASPER (*with contemptuous laugh*). Such a lax method of transacting business would invite litigation. What would you say, Mr. Thackeray?

COMMODORE. Unquestionably. Yet I have known of such cases happening under peculiar and unusual circumstances, for there is a certain code of honor among some miners that to them is more binding than any law in the land.

WRASPER. That is an interesting fact to know, and serves to strengthen my opinion that Mr. Brayley may have to institute searching investigation before claiming his undisputed title to the fortune which should have been his father's, particularly if—as we fear—Mr. Talbot has gone down on the *Cedwin*. Sad, very sad—he would have been such an important witness in presenting our case.

COMMODORE. Your point is well taken, Mr. Wrasper. The accumulated profits from the mines must now be enormous, and warrant a claimant spending time and money almost without stint to prove his legal rights and interests in the property.

WRASPER (*smiling*). Mr. Thackeray, you voice my views absolutely. If you will allow me to say, Mrs. Darling, I regard it as extremely fortunate in having such a competent ally as Mr. Thackeray to assist us in our research, and now that you and Mr. Brayley have virtually given me a free reign in this matter, it would seem to me the sooner I get busy the better. (*Business of gathering up his papers as if about to end the conference. The COMMODORE and MRS. DARLING exchange glances, she nods her head. WRASPER rises*) Have you any suggestion to offer, Mr. Thackeray?

COMMODORE. Yes, just a word before we adjourn, Mr. Wrasper, and I am going to speak bluntly. I come from the West, where we do things on a broad all-out-of-door scale. Our prairies and rivers are vast, and it sometimes seems as if there was a spirit of rugged manliness almost suggested by our everlasting hills. The men and women out there think and act on a broad plan. Pettiness and caterpillars are counted as undesirable assets. We admire a shrewd business man, but an over-reach we despise.

WRASPER (*confused and angry*). Mr. Thackeray, I fail to catch the drift of this burst of sentiment!

COMMODORE. Oh, I'm not posing, Mr. Wrasper. I remember what Stevenson said about the best of us, but you are a clever man, and know in your heart that Mr. Brayley's claim requires no rigid investigation.

WRASPER. I know nothing of the sort. Do you?

COMMODORE. Yes. And that's the reason I think it would be better not to waste any more of your valuable time, tilting at wind-mills.

WRASPER (*sneeringly*). Mere declarations and innuendoes amount to nothing—proofs are the things which count in law.

COMMODORE. Supposing I could produce a copy of the original agreement drawn up between Talbot and Brayley, in which it was stipulated that one of the partners could not dispose of his interest without the consent of the other?

WRASPER. Well, for the sake of argument, supposing you could; it would prove nothing. Talbot might have given his consent for Brayley to sell.

COMMODORE (*for the first time losing temper*). And knowing this, came on from the West to tell the heir that his father had frittered away a fortune! If he was that kind of a man drowning was too good for him.

WRASPER. Well, I propose to go on with the investigation. I have been retained by Mr. Brayley and Mrs. Darling, and will not be deterred by the interference of an outsider.

COMMODORE. But supposing Talbot should insist on you taking no further steps in this matter.

WRASPER (*jeeringly*). Talbot! Insist! You are becoming fanciful.

COMMODORE. That is just what occurred to me last evening, when I received a message from Talbot—by wireless. It was in the form of a quotation, you may have heard it. I will copy it for future reference.

WRASPER (*ironically*). I should be pleased to read it.

COMMODORE. Doubtless. And I think you will not doubt its genuineness. (*Writes message, signs it, gives it to DICK and WRASPER to read*)

DICK (*reads aloud*). "In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt, but being seasoned with a gracious voice obscures the show of evil. Murray Talbot." (*Surprise and consternation registered*) Why, this is Talbot's writing! That's his signature!

COMMODORE. Yes, I believe it is.

WRASPER. Oh, so you are Talbot. (*Mockingly*) Well, Mr. Talbot, you have played your rôle admirably.

COMMODORE. A rôle for the most part forced upon me by a twist of circumstances. For instance, if you will again glance at the message I sent to your office, you will find I make no allusion to sailing on the *Cedwin*. A brief cruise was the explanation I gave for my non-appearance.

WRASPER. Probably one of my clerks is responsible for circulating that report.

COMMODORE. And perhaps I am indebted to him for the surprising intelligence that I have a son wounded somewhere in France. The shock was awful.

WRASPER. Probably. I am beginning to see that I have been made the butt in a petty conspiracy, and at the hands of those who advocate fair and open dealing.

COMMODORE. Mr. Wrasper, if your business methods do not happen to meet with my approval, you are probably rated as a clever man, and I never want to see a clever man kept down. There is a young woman known as Sophie Kent, lately in your employ I believe, who needs a clever lawyer badly. She was arrested this morning with her clever accomplice, charged with robbery.

WRASPER. Another bomb! I am indeed in the camp

of enemies. I will hasten to withdraw from such treacherous ground. (*Has gathered up papers, and starts in the direction of D.L.*)

MRS. D. (*goes UP and opens D.L.*) The young people are in the morning room, Mr. Wrasper. Perhaps you would prefer leaving by this, the more direct and shorter way. (WRASPER *gives her a vindictive look. Bows stiffly and EXITS D.R. Slight pause*)

DICK. Mr. Talbot, is all this true?

COMMODORE (*smiling*). M-m-most of it. (DICK's face registers disappointment)

COMMODORE. Oh, I'm Talbot, and I fancy there will be no necessity for Miss Lilla Hampton returning to the stage, for her husband will be a pretty rich man.

DICK (*with feeling, offering his hand*). And I owe it all to you, sir.

COMMODORE. No, Dick, to your father, my dearest friend, worthy in every sense the grand old name of gentleman.

DICK (*with show of feeling, voice a little husky*). Thank you, sir. If—if you will excuse me—I must go and tell Isabel.

COMMODORE. That's right, Dick, precisely what I would do if I were in your place. (DICK *nods and smiles and EXITS hurriedly, D.L.*)

MRS. D. But we owe much to you, Mr. Talbot.

COMMODORE. And I owe the son far more than I can ever hope to repay.

MRS. D. Mr. Talbot—Commodore, have you the agreement signed by you and Carlton Brayley?

COMMODORE (*some show of slight embarrassment*). Why, yes—certainly. Didn't you hear me tell Wrasper I could show him a copy of it?

MRS. D. Yes, but where is the original?

COMMODORE. Why—I—have the original.

MRS. D. Where?

COMMODORE (*a little stiffly*). Here, would you like to see it?

MRS. D. If you would be so indulgent.

COMMODORE (*takes out wallet, selects an old looking*

document which he hands to her). I brought it with me in case of emergency.

MRS. D. Thank you very much. (*Takes paper. Cheers heard from other room. Cries of: "What's the matter with DICK BRAYLEY, he's all right." Applause and laughter. Young people come romping, all excited, D.L.*)

ISABEL (*goes over to MRS. DARLING*). Isn't it glorious, Mrs. Darling?

MRS. D. Fine, splendid, dear.

TONY. Now I'll leave it to anybody here, wasn't I always strong for the Commodore?

COMMODORE (*chuckling*). But at our first meeting, wasn't there something said about somebody being a crook? (*All laugh*)

TONY. Ah—yes. But that was the revenue officer I was alluding to. (*All laugh, in which the COMMODORE and TONY join and shake hands*) But to show Commodore that there is no antip, we want you to come and join us in a mild drink to the health and prosperity of the new millionaire Dick Brayley, and the millionairess, his charming wife. (*Makes sweeping bow to ISABEL*)

EDITH. Come, Mrs. Darling.

MRS. D. In just a moment I will join you.

ISABEL (*goes over and slips her hand through the COMMODORE'S arm, leads him towards door*) It all seems too good to be true, and you have been such a good friend and—

COMMODORE. Nonsense; it all just happened. (*They EXIT, talking, D.L.* MRS. DARLING *spreads out agreement and reads it. Takes reading glass from table drawer. Her face registers surprise, then alarm, then softens. Holds paper up to light. Goes over to mantel, takes match from holder, lights it, holds it behind paper. Blows out match, comes DOWN to table. All during this scene subdued laughter from other room, perhaps a line or two of "He's a jolly good fellow." More applause, after they cease*)

ENTER the COMMODORE, D.L.

COMMODORE. Mrs. Darling, the young people are most impatient to have you join them.

MRS. D. (*assumes stern expression*). Close the door, please. Sit down. (*Indicates chair across the table*) Mr. Talbot, I am frightfully sorry to say—well, to put it bluntly, I have discovered that you are a fraud and a forger.

COMMODORE (*evidently much embarrassed*). Mrs. Darling! Why—I protest——

MRS. D. This paper is a sham from beginning to end. Carleton Brayley never signed this paper.

COMMODORE. Are you acquainted with his signature?

MRS. D. No. But this signature was traced. (*The COMMODORE'S glance wavers and falls*) Under a strong glass the deception is quite apparent. As a criminal you are a careless bungler, for the agreement is dated ten years before this paper was manufactured. A callow novice would have been more clever, for water marks are the most hackneyed clue known in detective fiction. Supposing Mr. Wrasper had insisted on examining this paper?

COMMODORE. I was pretty sure he would not. A guilty conscience is always a faint-hearted one. Mrs. Darling, can you guess why I prepared that paper?

MRS. D. I think perhaps I could. (*Voice a little trembly*) And—if I—I—had known you a little longer, I am afraid I would be tempted to call you—a—dear, generous old scamp.

COMMODORE. We must always keep the secret from Dick, that in a moment of injured pride his father sold his interest in the mine to me. The original agreement was destroyed. Dick is entitled to the money by every law of equity. (*Reaches out his hand and lays it on MRS. DARLING'S*) Mrs. Darling, you will promise to keep our secret? (*MRS. DARLING, rather stirred, bows her head*)

ENTER WATKINS, D.L.

WATKINS. I beg pardon, Mrs. Darling, but the young people insist on my announcing that lunch is served.

MRS. D. Very well, Watkins, tell them I'm coming. (*WATKINS bows and EXITS D.L.*)

COMMODORE. And such delightful young people they are!

MRS. D. (*leading the way slowly towards door*). Positively exhilarating.

COMMODORE. It seems to me everything about here radiates sunshine.

MRS. D. (*coqueting*). Yes, and the view is charming.

COMMODORE. One might say fascinating.

MRS. D. And the breezes soft and caressing.

COMMODORE (*looking into her eyes*). And the skies so bright and sparkling. (*They are at the door*)

MRS. D. Y-e-s—Commodore?

COMMODORE. And as I mentioned to Watkins, what an ideal place to spend a honeymoon. (MRS. DARLING gives half saucy laugh as they pass through the doorway. They are greeted with applause, and as the curtain descends can be heard the song: “For he’s a jolly good fellow”)

SLOW CURTAIN

FARCES

TANGLES

Farce in One Act. Four Males, Two Females

By C. LEONA DALRYMPLE

One interior scene. Bill Tracy accepts Mrs. Janeway's invitation to dinner, intended for his cousin, Phil. Tracy, who is Jack Janeway's sham. Elsie, her maid, advertised for a husband under the soubriquet of "Bright Eyes." Jenkins, Bill's valet, answers it as X. Y. Z. The mistakes in identity get them into a tangle of surprises, finally unraveled by Jack, who arrives opportunely. The "situations" are tremendously funny and keep the audience in roars of laughter. Plays forty-five minutes.

PRICE 15 CENTS

A NIGHT IN TAPPAN

Farce in One Act. Two Males, Three Females

By O. B. DUBOIS

One interior scene. The action commences at 10:45 P. M., on the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. John Betts, quite unexpectedly, at the home of Mr. Augustus Betts, while Mrs. Augustus Betts is awaiting her husband's return from the city. The complications caused by a saucy, blundering, Irish servant, Mr. Augustus being entirely ignorant of the new arrivals, are screamingly bewildering. Plays about thirty minutes.

PRICE 15 CENTS

KISSING THE WRONG GIRL

Farce in One Act. One Male, Two Females

By W. C. PARKER

No scenery needed. It is the case of a "cheeky" book-agent, two sisters who look much alike, all sorts of funny mistakes, and any number of ridiculous situations, that will keep the audience in a continuous roar of laughter. The piece can be played either "straight" or with specialties. Plays about thirty minutes.

PRICE 15 CENTS

THE NEW REPORTER

Farce in One Act. Six Males, Two Females

By FRANKLIN JOHNSTON

One interior scene. Hobbs, the proprietor of a newspaper, is expecting a new reporter, whom he has engaged on trial. Nancy, Hobbs' daughter, persuades her lover, Jack, who is unknown to her father, to personify the new reporter, and gets to work. The blunders he makes, and the arrival of Tupper, the real reporter, result in a general flare-up, until explanations are made, and Tupper is persuaded by Nancy to retire in favor of Jack. Plays forty-five minutes.

PRICE 15 CENTS

MA'S NEW BOARDERS

Farce in One Act. Four Males, Four Females

By W. C. PARKER

No scenery required. Mrs. Holdtight leaves her boarding-house in her daughter's charge. Prof. Alto-Gether calls a rehearsal of the village choir, but gives them the wrong address. The choir turns up at Mrs. H.'s, and are mistaken for new boarders. Then follows a uproarious series of incidents that end in the Professor's round-up. Can be played "straight" or with specialties. Excellent chance for single or double quartette. Plays thirty minutes.

PRICE 15 CENTS

FARCES

SURPRISES

Farce in One Act. Two Males, Three Females

BY C. LEONA DALRYMPLE

One interior scene. On the anniversary of Ruth's wedding day her mother arrives, unannounced, as a surprise for her. Her husband plans to surprise her with the present of an Angora cat. The maid-servant conceals the mother in an adjoining room; the butler conceals the cat in the same room, and locks them both in. The result in both cases is unexpectedly surprising, and an imminent catastrophe is finally and most surprisingly averted. Plays thirty minutes.

PRICE 15 CENTS

A BACHELOR'S BABY

Farce in One Act. Two Males, Two Females

BY KATHARINE KAVANAUGH

One interior scene. An exceedingly comical sketch, depicting the woes of a struggling artist, on whose hands a baby is left while he is at the station awaiting his fiancée. Full of action from start to finish. Sure to be a success. Plays about thirty minutes.

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Farce in One Act. Three Males, One Female

BY GEORGE M. ROSENER

One interior scene. An inimitable sketch, full of rapid repartee and rollicking "Situations." Billie is a whole team in himself; his uncle and brother-in-law force the fun, but Billie comes out on top. The action is unflagging and irresistibly funny. Plays about twenty minutes.

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TOO MANY HUSBANDS

Farce in Two Acts. Eight Males, Four Females

BY ANTHONY E. WILLS

One interior scene. Arthur Maitland, living with Harry and Milly Brown, draws a regular allowance from his uncle, Col. Crane, upon the plea of being married. The colonel requests a picture of the supposed wife, and Arthur, not having any ready at hand, forwards that of Milly, without her knowledge. He thereupon suddenly announces an immediate visit expressly to make the acquaintance of Milly. After much persuasion Milly undertakes to assume for the few hours the character of Arthur's wife. The colonel arrives, and thereupon follows a series of situations, complications and climaxes, which make this farce one of the most laughable. All the characters are good and strongly contrasted. Plays two hours.

PRICE 25 CENTS

A WHITE SHAWL

Farce in Two Acts. Three Males, Three Females

BY C. LEONA DALRYMPLE

One interior scene. Costumes modern. A cleverly arranged "Comedy of Errors," in which an elderly doctor's attempt at wooing a young girl already engaged—an old maid's efforts to secure a mate—and the strategy of two young men to defeat the doctor's aims all result in getting things tangled up in the most ludicrous manner. Woman's wit and a white shawl set matters right at last. Plays one and a half hours.

PRICE 15 CENTS

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